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THESIS

**PROTESTANT PARAMILITARIES IN NORTHERN
IRELAND, 1969-1992**

by

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June 1999

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PROTESTANT PARAMILITARIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 1969-1992

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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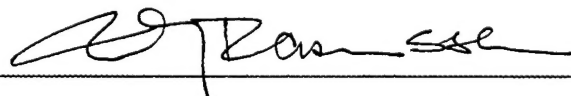
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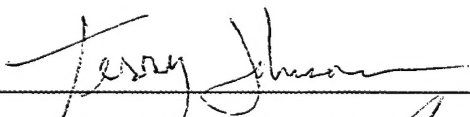


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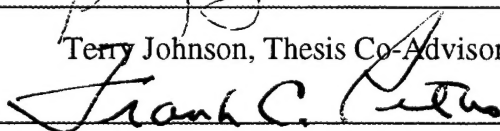
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ABSTRACT

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The roots of the paramilitary activity, Protestant strategic culture, and Ulster Protestants' unique relationship with Great Britain are discussed. The close relationship with Britain led to claims of security force collusion with the Protestant groups. This notion of collusion and a specific intelligence operation against the UDA involving a British Army agent, Brian Nelson, are assessed. The thesis concludes with observations regarding the impact of Protestant paramilitaries on the conflict and the need for continued intelligence on their activities and intentions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

Northern Ireland has been the scene of an intense social, religious, and political conflict between Catholics and Protestants for the past thirty years. The roots of these difficulties and the precedents for violent exchanges between the Protestant and Catholic populations are hundreds of years old and stem from the opposite experiences each community had regarding British colonialism. The last thirty years, known as the "Troubles," saw regular exchanges of death and destruction between the Catholic and Protestant communities.

The Troubles began in 1969 when long-standing rivalries between Catholics and Protestants combined with civil-rights activism to produce a precarious and deadly situation in Northern Ireland. Staunch supporters in each community, Catholic Republicans and Protestant Loyalists, led battles, respectively, against the other community. British Army units were deployed in Northern Ireland to respond to the growing violence between Catholics and Protestants and to separate warring factions so as to prevent a civil war.

The Catholic community initially welcomed the army to help protect Catholic areas from Protestant assault. Catholic views eventually changed, however, as a result of several confrontations between soldiers and Catholics. In time, the British Army presence became unacceptable to Catholics, especially to the Republican faction that desired a united Ireland.

The army remained in Northern Ireland as Catholic and Protestant terrorist organizations acted to advance and protect the interests of their respective communities. They thus became a Republican target along with other security forces. Republican terrorism became a priority of the security forces from this point on.

The struggle between the terrorist groups and the state security forces now spans three decades. Studies of this conflict and its related topics, such as security force operations and intelligence, are important due to the impact of the Troubles on this democratic society. Deaths related to the conflict number approximately 3,500, along with countless numbers of injuries and immeasurable material destruction. The violent scope of this conflict is better appreciated when the number of casualties is put into context with Northern Ireland's relative population of only a million and a half people. Proportionately, 3,500 deaths in Northern Ireland would represent over 600,000 deaths in the United States over that same 30-year period.¹

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) is responsible for over half of the deaths in the conflict. Therefore, much of the focus on the conflict in Northern Ireland in the literature and the media has been on the IRA. However, the Protestant community has also produced its own bands of terrorists who are responsible for almost one third of the conflict-related deaths. Brendan O'Brien, at Dublin University, maintains that "[o]utside

¹ Steve Bruce, *Northern Ireland: Reappraising Loyalist Violence* (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1992), 1.

Northern Ireland, few people – journalists, political parties or governments – properly focused on the high rate...[of Protestant killings].”²

Policy makers have not always treated Protestant violence with the same degree of concern as they have IRA violence. Protestant paramilitary organizations also share significant responsibility for the senseless death and destruction witnessed in Northern Ireland over the last thirty years. These Protestant terrorists were not only responsible for several of the earliest acts of violence, including the first bombings, but are also responsible for approximately 1,000 deaths thus far in the conflict. In comparison to IRA and Republican violence, a higher percentage of Protestant victims have been civilians (rather than terrorists).³ Their targets included Catholics and fellow Protestants; terrorists and civilians; and army and other security force personnel.

Although Protestants outnumber Catholics in Northern Ireland (known among Protestants as Ulster) by about two to one, they fear losing a sense of privilege that has developed through close ties with Britain over several hundred years. Moreover, they especially fear any physical or armed demonstration advocating political change. The Protestant community wishes to remain British and resists any policies or developments, peaceful or otherwise, that would lead to a united Ireland under Catholic rule. Thus, the Protestant community has provided its own armed responses to Catholic uprisings at

² Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Fein, 1985 to Today* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 26.

³ Jim Cusack and Max Taylor, “Resurgence of a Terrorist Organisation – Part 1: The UDA, a Case Study,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 3. This does not include members of the government security forces.

various times in Ulster's long history. The responses have not always been necessarily for the protection of Protestants and their homes, but have usually been directed at Catholics and their homes and businesses. The current Troubles are no exception.

Protestant men responded quickly in the late 1960s to what they saw as a resurgent IRA in conjunction with civil-rights activities by organizing paramilitary groups. The groups were small at first, but did not hesitate to initiate violence. The Protestant paramilitary groups grew in size and number as the violence escalated on both sides in the early 1970s. The level of Protestant paramilitary violence has varied over the years, but the groups have always had a significant impact on the direction and severity of the conflict. The Protestant violence naturally brought about additional Catholic retaliatory violence, as well as creating additional problems for government security forces. The Protestant paramilitary activity continues to fuel sectarian divisions and violence, to drain security resources, and to threaten both the peace process and the overall stability in Northern Ireland.

B. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis examines the nature of Protestant terrorism during the recent Troubles, from 1969 to 1992. Although many of the elements regarding Protestant terrorism remain current into 1999, the literature available on the subject is more limited after 1992. Chapter II provides an in-depth examination of Protestant paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. An explanation of their heritage and modern development is provided. The two largest groups, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defense Association

(UDA), are detailed including their history, activities, philosophy, and membership. Some differences between the Protestant groups and the IRA are also presented.

Chapter III discusses Protestant strategic culture and the roots of Protestant concerns in this political conflict. Knowledge of Protestant fears and motivations is important in understanding the development of organized and violent responses in Ulster's history. This analysis also provides a framework for anticipating future Protestant responses.

Chapter IV analyzes a particular problem associated with Protestant paramilitarism – collusion between government security forces and the Protestant paramilitaries. The accusation has often been made especially by Catholics, that there has been widespread and high-level collusion over the last 30 years. This notion of collusion is a difficult one for the British government; indeed the government and the Protestant paramilitary groups shared the same target – the IRA.

A good intelligence strategy is necessary to successfully implement sensitive political and security policies in such a complex conflict as the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Chapter V deals with an intelligence operation against the UDA. The case revolves around the importance of human intelligence operations (as opposed to technical means such as satellites) in Northern Ireland. The account details the recruitment, placement, and handling of Brian Nelson, who was a British Army agent in the UDA. This study reveals the British appreciation for the need to target Protestant paramilitaries also, and the potential benefits for such practices.

Finally, Chapter VI presents some conclusions and observations regarding the impact of Protestant paramilitaries on the conflict and what lessons are available for future policy development in Northern Ireland as well as in other crisis areas with similar characteristics. While Republican terrorists and issues receive most of the political and media attention, Protestant concerns and Protestant paramilitary activity will continue to influence the direction of the conflict in Northern Ireland significantly. Intelligence efforts directed at the Protestant paramilitaries should continue in order to facilitate balanced political and security policies.

The significance of this thesis involves both developments in Northern Ireland as well as any future conflicts that the United States may be involved in. The future of Northern Ireland is far from certain despite the current peace process. Any peace process involving such deep, emotional issues is always uncertain. As Catholics are awarded more political and social power, Protestants are likely to feel more uncomfortable. A Catholic population destined to become the majority through higher birth rates will continually aggravate the Protestant sense of vulnerability. It is therefore important to understand and evaluate Protestant terror in Northern Ireland and its associated problems, and to provoke thought regarding the capability of security policies and intelligence to provide an effective framework against any future Protestant violence.

Additional value is gained from this study for both ongoing and any future "hot spot" operations that the United States may become involved in. The British spent an incredible amount of time, money, and human resources trying both to contain and fix the problems in Northern Ireland. Similarly, many crises that the United States is likely to

face around the globe in the near future may also include deep historical divisions that must first be understood, and then approached through disciplined yet creative means. The study and analysis of Protestant terrorism in Northern Ireland should reveal lessons that may help U.S. policy makers, intelligence professionals, and security personnel better prepare future responses to similar problems around the globe.

C. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following definitions are provided to help the reader throughout the text:

The term "*security forces*" is used to denote government forces used in Northern Ireland to maintain law and order, and specifically in this context, to combat terrorism. These include various types of rotating British Army units (infantry, intelligence, etc.), the locally recruited Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR), and police, known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

The term "*Unionist*" is used to denote any person in Northern Ireland (mostly Protestant) who wants to maintain official ties with Britain, but prefers to do so by peaceful means.

The term "*Loyalist*" is used to denote a Northern Ireland Protestant that wants to maintain official ties with Britain and is often willing to use violent means to do so. The term is often used to refer to a Protestant paramilitary member or supporter.

"*Pro-state terror*" is the term used by sociologist Steve Bruce to describe the activities of Protestant paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. "Pro-state" groups share the same main target or concern as the government security forces, in this case, Catholic

terrorists such as the IRA. Although not sanctioned by the government, pro-state terror groups claim their actions are in concert with government objectives. However, pro-state terror groups such as the Protestant paramilitary in Northern Ireland occasionally violate their allegiance to the government by also targeting security forces if government policies appear to threaten the status quo.⁴

The term “*Nationalist*” is used to denote any person in Northern Ireland (mostly Catholic) who wants to unite Ulster with the rest of Ireland through peaceful means.

The term “*Republican*” is used to denote any Catholic who wants a united Ireland and is often willing to use violence. The term is also associated with supporters of the IRA.

The following abbreviations are employed throughout the text:

FRU Field Research Unit
IRA Irish Republican Army
RUC Royal Ulster Constabulary
UDA Ulster Defense Association
UDR Ulster Defense Regiment
UFF Ulster Freedom Fighters
UVF Ulster Volunteer Force

⁴ Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

II. PROTESTANT PARAMILITARIES

This chapter describes Protestant paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. The discussion includes the roots and the tradition of armed Protestant response as well as the reasons for the resurgence of Protestant paramilitary organizations over the last 30 years. There have been various Protestant groups with a paramilitary character that have been active at different stages of the current Troubles, but coverage here focuses on the two major groups, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA). The development, structure, and activities of these two groups are presented as well as some points regarding the nature of 'pro-state' terrorism.

The activities of Protestant paramilitary groups are broken down into three phases in the current Troubles. Protestant paramilitary groups were more active in terrorist operations during phases one (around 1970 to 1979) and three (1988 through the early 1990s) than they were in the second phase (around 1980 to 1987), when terrorist activity took a subordinate role to criminal activities. Particular problems during these three periods are discussed, such as criminal activities (including racketeering), a lack of centralized authority, and rivalries among various groups.

A. REASONS THAT DETERMINED THE RISE OF PROTESTANT PARAMILITARISM

Several factors explain the development of Protestant paramilitary groups. Much of the impetus has come from historical and cultural factors as well as strategic concerns, but each episode in history where the Protestant groups rise up to become more active has

had its own events and conditions that cause the resurgence in organized militancy. The current Troubles starting in the late 1960s are no different. Northern Ireland saw civil rights protests and disruptions in the late 1960s, as did other societies. Coupled with the Protestant fear that this activity was kindled by Republicanism or, at the very least, that Republicans would leverage the situation for their benefit, Loyalists felt a need to organize an armed response and even take preemptive action.

Protestants have claimed their responses were due to a new drive of Republican terror. Protestants viewed Republicans simply as terrorists operating under the guise of civil-rights activities, and viewed themselves as "counter-terrorists," not as terrorists. This belief has been sustained throughout the Troubles. Emotion, fear, and uncertainty have driven Protestant motivations. The Republican violence in this early part of the Troubles served to build up fear and bitterness in the Protestant community. Many felt they had to defend their homes, families, and communities from this onslaught.

B. ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE AND ULSTER DEFENSE ASSOCIATION

The first group to form was the Ulster Volunteer Force. By 1972, however, it was surpassed in membership strength when several community defense associations banded together to form the Ulster Defense Association, a response to growing unrest and a deterioration of the security situation in many key housing and business areas. Protestants as well as Catholics were leaving or were forced to leave their homes in Catholic areas due to the effects of barricades, riots, and fires. Protestants felt vulnerable,

especially with the loss of the armed B-Special constabulary as a source of protection.⁵ Volunteers within particular neighborhoods began to organize themselves to defend their communities.⁶ A decreasing sense of law and order in 1972 caused frustration and disdain over unclear and inadequate security policies.⁷ This lawlessness in the community and the tension between Loyalists and state authorities gave many Loyalists an excuse for their actions.⁸

Other reasons for becoming a Loyalist paramilitary presented themselves as the Troubles wore on: revenge for IRA atrocities; fear that a 'doomsday' situation was approaching in which 'Ulster' would be thrust out of the Union and placed at the mercy of the IRA; a sincerely held belief that it was a man's duty to defend his heritage from a ruthless enemy; encouragement from Loyalist women for their menfolk to show the courage to 'do what the IRA was doing'.⁹

A more in-depth discussion of the two leading Protestant paramilitary groups, the UVF and the UDA, will help illustrate the nature of Loyalist terror and the development of Loyalist activity over the last thirty years.

In 1966, the modern UVF was formed and led by shipyard worker and former soldier, Gusto Spence. Spence and fellow shipyard workers from the Protestant Shankill Road area of Belfast feared an IRA resurgence and felt compelled to organize a

⁵ Abolished in 1969, the B-Specials were an armed reserve constabulary formed to deal specifically with communal, i.e. Catholic violence.

⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace* (Boulder, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997), 130.

⁷ Desmond Hamill, *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland, 1969-1984* (London: Methuen, 1985), 106.

⁸ Sarah Nelson, *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 126.

⁹ Coogan, 283.

paramilitary group to counter any such contingency. The group declared the following early in 1966:

From this day on we declare war against the IRA and its splinter groups. Known IRA men will be executed mercilessly and without hesitation. Less extreme measures will be taken against anyone sheltering or helping them, but if they persist in giving them aid then more extreme methods will be adopted. We will not tolerate any interference from any source and we solemnly warn the authorities to make no more speeches of appeasement. We are heavily armed Protestants dedicated to this cause.¹⁰

The UVF originally only had about 20 members and their activities were limited to several robberies and two murders. The first murder was of a drunk Catholic man as he walked down a street at night singing nationalist songs. The second was of a Catholic pub worker. Spence's activities received little support in 1966. However, civil rights activities in the late 1960s increased and led to more violence and Republican activities, which somewhat validated Spence's earlier push. The UVF was thus re-energized.¹¹ The UVF name was copied from the Protestant force that resisted home rule in the early part of the century. The modern UVF was able to draw on this history and attract Protestant men that were willing to kill, go to prison, or die to prevent a united Ireland.¹²

The growth of political violence and instability by 1971 led the UVF to begin its campaign of sectarian killings and pub bombings.¹³ The UVF, although the second

¹⁰ David Boulton, *The UVF 1966-73: An Anatomy of Loyalist Rebellion* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 40.

¹¹ Steve Bruce, "Loyalists in Northern Ireland: Further Thoughts on 'Pro-State Terror,'" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 68.

¹² Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 32.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

largest Protestant paramilitary organization, remained rather secretive throughout its existence and retained a more military persona than the UDA. It claimed that it was only a reactive force, one in response only to Republican violence, and that there would be no UVF without an IRA. The UVF suggested that it would cease violence when the IRA stopped its operations.¹⁴

Although the UVF never rivaled the UDA in size or exposure, it managed to maintain sufficient membership over the years by drawing from the urban working class. The UVF is strongest in the Belfast area, but has enjoyed better support than the UDA in rural areas where the historic appeal of the 1912 UVF is stronger.¹⁵ The strong presence by both groups in Belfast led to competition and a propaganda war between the UVF and UDA. The UVF "...continually claimed to be the 'clean' force whose conduct set them apart from the...[UDA]...who preyed on people, robbed shops, demanded extortion money, etc."¹⁶ Its purpose throughout much of the Troubles, however, included preparations for possible large-scale operations in case of civil war.¹⁷ The organization has been banned for much of its existence except for a short respite between 1974 and 1975 when the ban was lifted.

¹⁴ Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Fein, 1985 to Today* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 91-92.

¹⁵ Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 147.

¹⁶ Nelson, 146.

¹⁷ Hamill, 127.

The UDA, on the other hand, avoided proscription for much of its tenure. It became the largest of all the Protestant paramilitary groups by combining many local defense associations. It even successfully distanced itself from many violent activities by using a separate military section with a separate name, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), which the UDA used to claim responsibility publicly for most operations.

The roots of UDA development were contained in the fear and community disarray that prevailed in the early part of the Troubles. Through 1971, UVF activities were insignificant and organization was lacking. IRA violence continued and many felt Loyalists were not properly matching it. Vigilante groups or local defense associations continued in various areas, but again, coordination was lacking. The Ulster Defense Association brought the various local defense groups, such as the Woodvale Defense Association and the Shankill Defense Association, under central control and council in 1971.¹⁸ The UDA "...drew in those who believed the old Protestant dictum that the best form of defence was attack..." and also appealed to other desires for comradeship, involvement, and thrills.¹⁹ Not everyone who joined a paramilitary group was bent on massive violence. However, the UDA did provide the weapons and resources necessary for those Protestants who did want to kill Catholics.²⁰ Although UDA membership has

¹⁸ Boulton, 145.

¹⁹ Nelson, 105.

²⁰ Ibid., 127.

numbered in the tens of thousands, only a small minority was part of the hard core that was determined to plan and conduct violent actions:

...[T]he mass organisation, filled with many troublemakers and criminals, was a useful cover under which the hard core could operate. The UDA had two almost completely separate sets of people: the hard core and the rest. The comparatively innocent majority were likely to have jobs, turned up for a few meetings and sometimes stood guard outside the pubs or clubs where the hard core met. This latter group tended to be unemployed – and when not out on ‘business’ were to be found in the clubs or pubs.²¹

The UDA was formed and organized along lines similar to the military using brigades and companies. Councils shaped UDA leadership structure. The Inner Council headed the organization and decision matrix. In addition to the Inner Council, the UDA also had a second tier of leadership in the organization, the Outer Council, which had several representatives from each of the six brigades.²²

C. MINOR PARAMILITARY GROUPS AND SCOPE OF THE VIOLENCE

The UDA and the UVF have been the largest, most active, and most influential Protestant paramilitary organizations, but there have been numerous others that landed on the scene over the last thirty years. Some of those organizations included, but are not limited to, the following: Orange Volunteers, Protestant Action Force, Protestant Action Group, Red Hand Commando, Tara, Ulster Resistance, Ulster Service Corps, and the Ulster Young Militants. Some groups, such as Tara, lasted longer than others did, but most groups conducted very few operations if any at all. Most efforts were devoted to

²¹ Hamill, 127.

²² Jim Cusack and Max Taylor, “Resurgence of a Terrorist Organisation – Part 1: The UDA, a Case Study,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 11.

organizing and meeting, but not killing. Although some just served as alternate names for the major groups, UDA and UVF allowance for rival and splinter groups also served two important purposes. It allowed other groups to conduct or take the blame for certain activities that the UVF and UDA did not want to be associated with, and it also helped show proof through numbers that the Protestant resolve and response was credible.²³

As stated in the introduction, the Loyalists have been responsible for about one-third of the conflict-related deaths. Loyalist violence has included beatings, bombings, and individual assassinations. A summary of Loyalist killings and targets in comparison to Republican violence over a 20-year period follows in Table I.

Table 1. Deaths caused by Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries 1969-89 (%).

<u>Victim Status</u>	<u>Group Responsible</u>	
	Republican	Loyalist
Security Forces	847 (52.7)	10 (1.4)
Republican Paramilitary	146 (9.1)	21 (3.0)
Loyalist Paramilitary	18 (1.1)	40 (5.7)
Catholic Civilian	173 (10.8)	506 (71.8)
Protestant Civilian	379 (23.6)	114 (16.2)
Other	22 (1.4)	12 (1.7)
Prison Officers	23 (1.4)	2 (0.3)
TOTAL	1608 (100)	705 (100)

Source: Steve Bruce, "The Problems of 'Pro-State' Terrorism: Loyalist Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 77.

²³ Nelson, 126.

Some of the above statistics regarding Loyalist violence reveal several key discussion points. Loyalists killed half as many people as Republicans did and a much smaller number of security forces. The latter statistic naturally made Loyalists a second priority for security forces behind Republican terrorists. Republicans killed more fellow Republicans than Loyalists did in percentage and numbers (9.1 percent to 3.0 percent; 145 to 21) and Loyalists killed more fellow Loyalists than Republicans did in percentage and numbers (5.7 percent to 1.1 percent; 40 to 18). The highest percentage in any category for both groups was Loyalist killings of Catholic civilians at 71.8 percent. This figure is incongruent with claims that Loyalist groups mainly exist to counter Republican terror. In fact, only three percent of Loyalist killings in this period were of Republican paramilitaries. Even Loyalist killings of Protestant civilians outnumber the Republicans killed by Loyalists (114 to 21). Loyalists received criticism over the years due to an apparent lack of equivalency between political goals and the targets of much of their violence.²⁴

D. MEMBERSHIP, MOTIVATIONS, AND OPERATIONS

The Loyalist groups differed from the IRA in several other ways as well. Overall, the Loyalist paramilitaries were not as professional in their staffing, organization, or goals. Financial support and hidden arsenals also paled on the Protestant side. Since the

²⁴ Ibid.

Loyalists felt more like “counter-terrorists” or as Steve Bruce classifies them, ‘pro-state’ terrorists, they were easier to identify, influence, and police.²⁵ The ‘pro-state’ terrorist

...believes he is defending the status quo, the state, the government and he is much more open about his activities...[and]...loyalist killers...are much more likely to boast openly about it because they expect (or at least feel they are due) congratulations from the general public.²⁶

The reasons for Loyalist paramilitary groups have not been limited to security and political concerns. Some men belonged for the social interaction, acceptance, and thrills that paramilitarism provided. There were new tasks to be involved with such as information gathering and planning, as well as some excitement to be gained from the secret nature of a group and its operations that provided a change of pace from regular jobs, or for those that were unemployed. The identity and purpose gained from paramilitary membership also provided an enhancement in social status for many young Protestant men from the working class.²⁷

Loyalist paramilitary recruitment has been, however, limited by the existence of state organizations that Protestants could join if they wanted to counter Republican violence legitimately. The Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defense Regiment have provided better paying and legally mandated positions for the well educated and well intentioned. Arguably, the UDA and UVF have been "...left to recruit from the least

²⁵ Bruce, "Loyalists in Northern Ireland," 70-71.

²⁶ Ibid., 76.

²⁷ Nelson, 64.

competent sections of their population.”²⁸ Most Protestant paramilitary members have been age 17 – 40, the largest segment in their twenties. Only a small percentage of members were over 40 years old or were not from the working class.²⁹ Not only were a large percentage unemployed, but according to some statistics compiled in 1979, over 86 percent of convicted Loyalist terrorists also had prior criminal records. The criminal activities of the paramilitary groups continued to attract a hoodlum element to the organizations.³⁰

Although many Protestant paramilitaries were from the working class, the social and political agendas of these groups were never very strong. This contrasted with Republican groups like the IRA that had a clear set of political goals and social concerns. The Protestant paramilitaries were more concerned with drinking and beating up Catholics than formulating an agenda to improve housing, employment, or education. The lack of substantive, community-oriented goals among Loyalists has often been criticized: “Ask these fellas to rob a bank or kill a Catholic and you’ll get 50 volunteers, but to do anything constructive? Not one.”³¹

Much Loyalist activity revolved around pubs and drinking in the early part of the Troubles. Pubs were the gathering places for meetings, discussions, and other activities.

²⁸ Bruce, “Loyalists in Northern Ireland,” 73.

²⁹ Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 293-294.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 270-273.

³¹ Nelson, 188.

Planning of operations was rare; many acts of violence against Catholics merely stemmed from spontaneous decisions following hours of drinking that were high on emotion and low on judgement. Target selection amounted to no more than simply finding a Catholic and not necessarily a terrorist or IRA supporter. In addition, Loyalists who had been drinking carried out a high rate of Loyalist murders in contrast to Republican *modus operandi*.³² Moreover, bars were used for conducting numerous acts of violence against their victims in addition to meetings and drinking. Often a victim was apprehended and taken back to one of the bars or clubs into a back room or upstairs for interrogation and torture. These were called "romper rooms" and the actions were referred to as "rompering" victims.³³

The lack of a strong political purpose combined with a need to justify and support their existence led Protestant paramilitary groups to a life of crime and racketeering. The costs of running a paramilitary organization were more than what was received from community and external sources. Loyalists did not receive the same level of external support that Republicans did. Money was needed to sustain recruitment, training, operations, and other forms of support for members. Costs included salaries for key paramilitary leaders, arms purchases, supplies and other gear, and the support of prisoner

³² Bruce, "Loyalists in Northern Ireland," 76.

³³ Martin Dillon, *The Shankill Butchers* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 19-20. On page 19, Dillon explains: "The word 'romper' was derived from an Ulster Television series which involved children talking and playing with a television presenter."

families. They robbed banks, ran bars and illegal drinking clubs, and conducted various racketeering activities to draw the necessary income.³⁴

The money that was raised from racketeering and various activities was by its nature not well controlled. There was always the risk in these circumstances that those at the top would be tempted to help themselves through embezzlement. This was certainly the case among several Loyalist paramilitary leaders and led to occasional power struggles over the last thirty years.

The tendency toward useless and criminal activities, along with the loose array of Protestant groups, was due to a lack of centralized authority among the Loyalists.³⁵ Loyalist paramilitaries never successfully consolidated their groups and their efforts, and were often driven more by their local needs and power bases. For example, the Woodvale Defense Association listed its community name before the UDA moniker on floral tributes despite the fact that it had been a UDA company for many years.³⁶

Feuding within and among groups precluded any steps toward consolidation. The number of groups and the lure of racketeering income, especially in Belfast, naturally led to serious rivalries.³⁷ Disputes and competition have been the seeds for many new and often short-lived splinter groups throughout the Troubles. Although these new groups

³⁴ Steve Bruce, *Northern Ireland: Reappraising Loyalist Violence* (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1992), 17.

³⁵ Dillon, ix.

³⁶ Bruce, "Loyalists in Northern Ireland," 85.

³⁷ Coogan, 282.

were formed due to incompatible goals, preferred levels of militancy, personality problems, and power and money struggles, membership often overlapped among several groups. The rivalries were numerous, heated, and violent.

E. PERIODS OF ACTIVITY

Loyalist activity in Northern Ireland, especially by the UDA, can be roughly broken down into three periods. First, from about 1970 to 1978, the Protestant groups were powerful and somewhat ascendant while the security forces struggled to contain the Loyalist influence and violence. This first period in the 1970s saw the growth of the paramilitary groups in terms of membership and operations. They conducted bombings and assassinations as the RUC struggled with its institutional inadequacies to handle terrorism and the army had its hands full battling the IRA.

Operations slowed for the Loyalists during the second period (1979-1987) as the RUC improved its capabilities and the paramilitary groups (mostly the UDA) became more focused on criminal activities. Loyalist influence and moral authority was questioned in light of corruption within the paramilitary hierarchy. Politically driven activities were replaced by illegal money-raising operations.³⁸ “It is no exaggeration to assert that by the mid-1980s the UDA’s military organisation virtually existed only as the prop against which the rackets it ran were supported.”³⁹ Steve Bruce explains the

³⁸ Cusack and Taylor, 4-5.

³⁹ Ibid., 8.

decrease in activity in the 1980s and the improvements made by the RUC in protecting state interests:

The reforms of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and improved intelligence led many to conclude that the state no longer needed their assistance to defend itself and indeed that they were hampering the RUC. In this sense the state's policing and the UDA's work were seen as being balanced. As one became more effective there was less need for the other. Included in that improvement of state efficiency, of course, was increased efficiency in policing the UDA which meant that the costs of involvement were increasing at the same time as the perceived need was decreasing.⁴⁰

Things started to change for the UDA and other Loyalist paramilitary in the late 1980s. In the third period from 1988 until the early 1990s, some organizational and leadership changes led to increased killings by Loyalists. Many of these killings were of a sectarian nature; that is, victims were targeted simply because they were Catholic and not because they were necessarily involved or associated with Republican terrorism in any way.⁴¹ Growing internal disgust and disputes from a new generation pushed out the old leadership. The new power holders were interested in moving away from plain criminal activities and renewing efforts toward political violence and murder. Community attitudes were also more supportive of this change in the paramilitary agenda. Bruce argues that there is a possible link between these community attitudes and paramilitary activity:

...we can suppose that the increase in loyalist terrorism indicates an increase in popular support for terrorism. The relationship between popularity and activity is probably logarithmic rather than arithmetic – a small increase in popular support allowing a great increase in terrorism....⁴²

⁴⁰ Bruce, "Loyalists in Northern Ireland," 259.

⁴¹ Ibid., 255.

⁴² Ibid., 262.

The Protestant community, and especially the working class, was becoming more alienated and supported the paramilitary groups for several reasons. Many Protestants watched as the IRA continued a high level of activity for 20 years since 1969 without significant interruption by the security forces. It even appeared at times as if Republican violence helped achieve political successes. The strength and support for the IRA's campaign did not appear to be waning. It is possible that more Protestants believed that the way to reap their own political capital was to engage in their own campaign of violence. The notion of Protestant survival, and not just political rewards, may have also motivated some.⁴³ Steve Bruce concludes:

...the 'pro-state' terror group largely rises and falls in relation to popular perceptions among unionists of the extent to which the state (or themselves and they see the fate of the two as inexorably intertwined) is in peril.⁴⁴

The UDA succeeded in being viewed again as a serious threat and danger to peace in Northern Ireland. The community support, however, would not last. The sectarian nature of violence and the willingness to also attack security forces gradually eroded its popularity. Following several years of increased activity, and official acknowledgement of the significant threat it posed, the UDA was finally proscribed in July of 1992. Unionist politicians became

...unanimous in their condemnation of the UDA and many of them have called for internment. Even people who used to be active in the UDA are privately voicing the opinion that the present generation of activists should be put out of harm's way. While some people in working-class areas support the UDA's new aggression, there is opposition to actions which are seen as morally and politically wrong, to behaviour which

⁴³ Ibid., 262-263.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 265.

is seen as loutish, and to reckless bravado which brings unwelcome attention from republicans and the security forces.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid., 264.

III. PROTESTANT STRATEGIC CULTURE AND LOYALIST PARAMILITARISM

The different colonial experiences between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland produced competing outlooks on government and society. Protestants were more closely aligned and cooperative with British authorities and therefore benefited politically from that association. Protestants enjoyed a more privileged existence and developed a view that any improvement in the social and political life of Catholics was an unacceptable cost to be incurred by the Protestant community. The growth of various Protestant vigilante or paramilitary groups stemmed from this feared loss of power in Northern Ireland society.

This chapter describes the strategic culture of Protestants in Northern Ireland, the roots and development of that culture, and generally how Protestant strategic attitudes affect the current conflict. The Protestant community in Northern Ireland since the mid-1960s is examined. The level of analysis includes the historical roots of the culture and its impact on the Northern Ireland crisis since 1969. Discussion includes the foundation of the Protestant viewpoint in Ireland developed during British colonialism, the growth of Protestant power, Protestant interpretations of history and the importance of myth and folklore, attitudes toward Catholics, ties and allegiance to Britain, and the propensity for armed Protestant responses against Catholics.

A. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The difficulties between Catholics and Protestants in what is now Northern Ireland span several hundred years. Various cultural and political orientations have naturally developed among different groups associated with the conflict and have determined particular actions at various stages. A deeply rooted consciousness, or strategic culture, on both sides of the conflict drove the more modern Troubles between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland since 1969:

Politics in Northern Ireland is structured by a fundamental and enduring triangular conflict among Protestants, Catholics and Britain, with the interests and identities that motivate the two local groups deriving from the history of Ireland, and particularly of Ulster, as a settler colony. Accordingly, political conflict in contemporary Northern Ireland occurs between two communities that were formed by, and still contest the power relations issuing from, their opposite experiences of colonization. Colonialism empowered Protestants and disempowered Catholics....⁴⁶

The focus in much of the literature was on the retaliatory nature of Protestant violence and paramilitary groups, but the development of Protestant society in Northern Ireland also brought with it a zero-sum mentality. Protestants feel that they have a great deal to lose and will likely always be willing to fight the Catholics or even the British to protect what they feel is their strategic integrity. The Protestant strategic viewpoint has received less coverage and analysis in the conflict since 1969. The Catholic minority, however, has received a great deal of academic, political, and media attention throughout the more recent phase of the conflict:

Northern Irish Catholics have attracted far more attention from authors and scholars...Until the mid-1970s little research was done on the role of Protestant

⁴⁶ Michael MacDonald, "Blurring the Difference: The Politics of Identity in Northern Ireland," in *The Irish Terrorism Experience*, ed. Yonah Alexander and Alan O'Day (Brookfield, Vermont: Dartmouth Publishing Co., 1991), 89.

extremists in the latest Ulster conflict, despite their well-publicised involvement in the disturbances. As the weary inhabitants of...[Catholic areas]...were aware, everyone in the research and journalism business was 'doing the Catholics'.⁴⁷

The Protestant community also has its own heritage with insights to current Protestant behavior. The history of Protestants in Ireland produced a unique culture. The social, ethnic, religious, and political developments in Northern Ireland's history produced a strategic culture that helped shape the actions and decisions of Protestant housewives, pub owners, politicians, paramilitary forces, and the police. The Protestants are vastly outnumbered on the island, but are the majority in Northern Ireland. They have strong Christian beliefs, yet are not shy about demeaning or battling Catholics. Most believe in democracy, but many say that this belief applies only if Protestant opinions count more than those of Catholics or if Protestants are "first in line." As Loyalists, they feel strong legal and political ties to Britain and the Queen, yet want to act independently of London.

Much in Northern Ireland revolves around history, or one particular group's interpretation of specific events. There is a great deal of emphasis on tales, myths, and folklore that influence current social and political behavior. As Brendan O'Brien remarked, "In Unionism and Orangeism the past and present were one and the same fight."⁴⁸ Ireland is not a very progressive society by comparison to other European communities. Emigration has been fairly constant for several hundred years and the lack

⁴⁷ Sarah Nelson, *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 9.

⁴⁸ Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Fein, 1985 to Today* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 83.

of immigration has created a population smaller today than 150 years ago. “This trend...has contributed to the conservatism and self-absorption – some would say stagnation – of Irish social and political life...[An] overwhelming power of historical tradition and myth...[prevails].”⁴⁹

An initial look at Irish culture and the growth of Protestantism in Ireland is worthwhile as background. Irish culture stems from a mixture of native people with various groups of invaders such as Normans, Vikings, Gaels, and Celts. Christianity first appeared in Ireland in the fifth century and has had a profound influence on Irish society since then. Along with Christianity, significant British influence also spans many centuries. The feudal system helped develop power for the Anglo-Norman landholders to some extent. Firm control and lasting influence, however, came more slowly through years of intermarriage between Gaels and Anglo-Irish.

Political changes from the growth of the nation-state and the Reformation led to a division between Protestants and Catholics. British colonial efforts to contain Catholic power in Ireland led to violent struggles, and the subsequent defeat of Irish Catholic uprisings in the sixteenth century led to firmer British control. The Protestant political footprint and sense of British loyalty in Ireland was cultivated in the early seventeenth century as land was transferred from Catholics to Scottish Presbyterians.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Northern Ireland: Problems and Perspectives* (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1982), 4.

⁵⁰ Tom F. Baldy, *Battle for Ulster* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1987), 33-7.

This division between Catholics and Protestants widened as the British introduced more Scottish and English settlers. Gradually, the British introduced laws that denied rights and services to Catholics, rights that Protestants retained and used to hold the political advantage. Catholics maintained efforts for equality and demands for independence, but Protestants, although in the minority, were able to deflect these Catholic demands through the power, influence, and wealth they acquired with Crown sponsorship.⁵¹

B. THE ORANGE ORDER

There are numerous organizations and clubs in Northern Ireland society that recognize shared Protestant concerns, values, and traditions. These groups also wield considerable influence on Irish society with membership that crosses class lines. The Orange Order is the most significant of these groups in Northern Ireland and has played an important role in showcasing Protestant viewpoints:

Formed in 1795 into lodges to defend Protestant privilege, the Orange Order is synonymous with fundamentalist Protestantism and the Unionist Party. So entrenched did the Order become in Northern Irish society that by the early twentieth century, two-thirds of adult male Protestants were members. This hierarchy of orders, layered throughout Ulster life, overcame even class identity, providing a bond between laborers and white-collar Protestants.⁵²

The Order is extremely pro-British and pro-Union and has strong partnerships with other key Protestant organizations such as the Unionist Party. With a strong and devoted membership, Protestants helped other Protestants in employment, housing

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 40.

allocation, educational needs, and other key political concerns. The Orange Order is not without an anti-Catholic sentiment. Initiation of a new member involves the following acknowledgements:

Do you promise, before this Lodge, to give no countenance, by your presence or otherwise, to the unscriptural, superstitious, and idolatrous worship of the Church of Rome? And do you also promise never to marry a Roman Catholic, never to stand sponsor for a child when receiving baptism from a priest of Rome, nor allow a Roman Catholic to stand sponsor for your child at baptism? And do you further promise to resist,⁵³ by all lawful means, the ascendancy, extension and encroachments of that Church....

Orangeism and the Order recognized that a united stand amongst all Protestants was required to face challenges to Protestantism and the survival of Ulster. Thus, the Protestant community acknowledged the common religious bond as dominant over social hierarchy. There had to be at least one strong and effective organization that put aside class differences: "The Orange ethic proclaimed both the irrelevance and the danger of class conflict, for it undermined the common front against the enemy. Orangeism also provided a forum for defusing class tensions."⁵⁴

C. PROTESTANT ATTITUDES TOWARD CATHOLICS

Protestant opinions toward Catholics are filled with considerable emotion. The opinions have been formed by Protestant interpretations of history as well as by recent events. Fear, bigotry, and a perceived disloyalty dominate Protestant attitudes toward Catholics. The fear of Catholics stems from incidents in Irish history in which

⁵³ Sean McPhilemy, *The Committee: Political Assassination in Northern Ireland* (Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart, 1998), 404.

⁵⁴ Nelson, 42.

Protestants claim to have suffered great atrocities at the hands of the Catholics. This impact continues as stories are still passed down about problems that increased Protestant fears:

Protestant fears about their physical fate under Catholic rule were reinforced by historic beliefs about the lawlessness and ferocity of the native Irish. The 1920s troubles ensured that future generations of Protestants would have a store of folk memories about the physical hostility of Catholics, which any new crisis was likely to re-awaken.⁵⁵

The discussion of Catholic disloyalty is grounded in events from earlier in this century as well. Protestants remain bitter both about the Catholic uprising against British rule in 1916, at a time when Britain was deeply involved in the First World War, and about Dublin's neutrality declaration in the Second World War. Protestants see both instances as "cheap shots" made at a time when Britain was most vulnerable. These and other examples are used to affirm Protestant attitudes that lead to sweeping generalizations and discrimination. Loyalist propaganda likes to paint a poor picture of Catholic character overall and of church sponsorship of Republican violence:

The Ulster Defence Association's (UDA) major internal propaganda organ is called *Ulster*, and its pages exhort readers to view Catholics as lazy and subhuman. Furthermore, it pushes a link between the Catholic Church and the violence of the Provisionals, thereby implying that all Catholics are a threat to the physical well-being of all Protestants....⁵⁶

Northern Ireland Protestants are greatly fearful of their fate in a united Ireland. Any Catholic activity that has the potential to gather energy and possibly overrun or disrupt a Protestant-dominated Northern Ireland draws a Protestant backlash. For

⁵⁵ Baldy, 33.

⁵⁶ Joanne Wright, "Northern Ireland – A British Isles Security Complex," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 272.

example, the late 1960s brought civil-rights issues to the fore in Northern Ireland. Protestants saw civil rights marches and activity as aggressive and threatening to the safety and survival of the Protestant state. If sufficient countermeasures were not implemented, Protestants felt, the civil rights movement would successfully combine with Republican violence and erode the political integrity of the state.

Protestants are concerned about individual rights, marriage and divorce, birth control, education, and other key social concerns in a united Ireland. Joanne Wright remarked: "Protestants, while often ignoring their own forms of bigotry and discrimination, are very quick to point to the Catholic ethos of the state in the Republic of Ireland and argue that this would mean a loss of identity in any unified state."⁵⁷ The fear and distrust associated with Catholic individuals in Northern Ireland carries over to views concerning the Irish Republic. Protestants feel that the south actively supports and harbors Republican terrorists. Protestants are vulnerable and fall prey to any rhetoric that originates in the south regarding the need for and nature of political change in Northern Ireland.

D. PROTESTANT ATTITUDES TOWARD BRITAIN

Throughout Irish and specifically Ulster history, many instances of British "good will" deepened Protestant loyalty to the Crown. Northern Ireland Protestants showed their appreciation in several ways, including contributions to British efforts in the two world wars. Protestants remain very proud of and are not slow in mentioning the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 277.

volunteers of the 36th (Ulster) Division that proved themselves at the Battle of the Somme. Belfast also sent troops, ships, and aircraft to Britain during World War II. The shared challenges and victories such as the two world wars, and the British support of Protestantism, developed a sense of "Britishness" in the hearts and minds of Northern Ireland Protestants. These Protestants, however, have their own specific identity and sense of independence that makes their "Britishness" perhaps conditional. They may only support the British government as long as it supports the status quo. Protestants do not want any changes that lessen their social and political status in Northern Ireland.⁵⁸

Political relations for most of the century were good as Northern Ireland remained Protestant and Britain supported that reality. From the creation of the Irish Free State in 1921 up until 1969, Britain limited its interference in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland parliament at Stormont helped build a Protestant identity for Northern Ireland. It was a "Protestant parliament for a Protestant people."⁵⁹ Dealings between the two parliaments (Stormont and Westminster) did not concern constitutional affairs, but rather economic issues. Therefore, Protestants felt comfortable with British oversight and assistance as long as Protestants controlled their own political affairs.⁶⁰

Although...[Stormont]...was subordinate to Westminster, it was not perceived as such by northern unionists for very long...[T]hey were almost entirely masters in their own house, with wide freedom to control all local affairs, including security policy...[T]hey were

⁵⁸ Baldy, 33-34.

⁵⁹ *Northern Ireland: Problems and Perspectives*, 5.

⁶⁰ Nelson, 27.

virtually ignored by politicians and civil servants in London, who were thankful enough to be shot...of the Irish imbroglio.⁶¹

There were other elements that shaped Loyalists attitudes toward Britain. Loyalty, as discussed regarding Catholic actions during the two world wars, was an important issue with Protestants who wanted to be seen as capable and loyal defenders of the Crown throughout history. Protestants view Northern Ireland's contributions to the two world wars as a sign of loyalty. The nature of loyalty has also taken on a unique character among Protestants and Britain: "...Protestants were privileged by Britain because they, unlike Catholics, were expected to be loyal to Britain and they maintained loyalty because they were privileged."⁶² Northern Ireland Protestants wanted to be considered an important ally and partner, but also to be recognized for independent strength and shown a degree of respect. One way to achieve this was to act as Britain's representative against the political growth of Catholicism.

The sense of common heritage and shared history is very important to those in Northern Ireland determined to safeguard the official union with Great Britain. The whole core of Unionism is to feel British, and many observers, especially those that want a united and independent Ireland, often fail to see this. Unionists like to share in the traditions of Britain and to feel they have a link to a larger entity that includes more than

⁶¹ *Northern Ireland: Problems and Perspectives*, 5.

⁶² MacDonald, 90.

just their portion of Ireland. As Brendan O'Brien points out, the bonds are psychological and emotional, and are about shared history, adversities, triumphs, and sacrifices.⁶³

Loyalists want to be found endearing by the British and looked upon with a sense of pride, not of antagonism. However, Loyalists would even prefer "bad" British involvement to a unified Ireland; in fact, Loyalists will even strike at British policies, if they feel such a move is necessary to maintain British involvement. Some Loyalists believe that someday Britain may "sell them short" and succumb to pressure from the international media and the Irish Republic by placating Republicans at a political cost to Protestants.⁶⁴

As stated earlier, Northern Ireland Protestants and Britain got along well during the period from the creation of the Irish Free State to 1969. Questions about the relationship arose in the minds of Protestants after 1969, as Britain was forced to make various political decisions in response to the problems. During the first several years of the current troubles, British participation in the policy and security realm in Northern Ireland gradually increased as the situation worsened. By 1972, Britain felt that the security situation was out of control and informed the Northern Ireland government that Britain was assuming the responsibility for law and order. The Northern Ireland, or

⁶³ O'Brien, 94.

⁶⁴ Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 289.

Stormont, government resigned in protest. The Stormont parliament did not meet again, and Britain subsequently established Direct Rule.⁶⁵ Subsequently, relations deteriorated:

...[S]ince the imposition of direct rule from Westminster in 1972, and particularly since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, Northern Ireland Protestants have become much more unsure about the willingness of the British parliament to maintain their constitutional position as part of the United Kingdom. As a result elements of suspicion and even hostility can now be detected in the relationship. Protestants express fears that their religious and civil liberties would not be respected or guaranteed in any state dominated by Catholics.⁶⁶

The Anglo Irish Agreement in 1985 also suggested to Protestants that Britain was selling them out. The agreement acknowledged a place or voice for the Irish government in Northern Ireland's affairs and this led to a feeling of betrayal and mistrust among the Protestants in Northern Ireland. The lack of British consultation with Protestants during the course of the negotiations regarding the particular concessions being made and the language of the agreement greatly angered the Protestant community in Northern Ireland.⁶⁷

E. PROTESTANT PARAMILITARISM

The Loyalist tradition in Northern Ireland is a long and seemingly contradictory one. Protestant militant groups have arisen at various stages in Irish history to protect and preserve the place occupied by Protestants in both Northern Ireland and British society. They were willing to fight their fellow Irishmen for power and to fight the British in order to remain British. As Northern Ireland's first prime minister, Lord Craigavon, said in

⁶⁵ Wright, 274.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 282.

1922, "If Northern Ireland ever comes to an end, it will be because the protestants started fighting the British."⁶⁸ A Northern Ireland scholar, Sarah Nelson, asks:

Who are the loyalists of Ulster? To many outsiders they are 'the voice of unreason, the voice of illogicality'. They are loyal to Britain, yet ready to disobey her; they reject clerical tyranny, yet oppose secularism; they proclaim an ideology of freedom and equality, except for Catholics; they revere law and authority, then break the law. And they refuse to do the rational, obvious thing.⁶⁹

Not all the activities of Protestant groups were limited to actions against the Irish Republican Army. Most of these groups over time also saw fit to strike at civilians and even government security forces. What were the social and political motivations for these actions in a society where the Protestants held a significant majority? Why did Protestants choose violence and oppose the peace process at various stages? Perhaps the motivations for what appeared to be senseless tactical responses were in fact associated with strategic notions. According to Sarah Nelson:

...[M]any Protestants found their political world collapsing around them. Their beliefs, their very political and social system, were questioned on a world stage, while each political reform...seemed to remove another plank from the structure they were defending.⁷⁰

Unfavorable Protestant attitudes toward the Catholic community, combined with the strength and unity provided by such organizations as the Orange Order, have encouraged and enabled Protestants to organize, resist, and fight back when their community deemed it necessary. The formation of the original Ulster Volunteer Force

⁶⁸ David Boulton, *The UVF 1966-73: An Anatomy of Loyalist Rebellion* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 1.

⁶⁹ Nelson, 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

(UVF) in 1912 is one such example. In response to efforts for Home Rule, Edward Carson helped consolidate and organize various Protestant groups into the original UVF. The response was considerable (the force grew to about 90,000 in 1912) and showed the depth of Protestant resolve regarding political changes that have potential or direct impact on the livelihood of Northern Ireland Protestants.⁷¹

Naturally, Protestants responded to direct threats from Republican activists, but also responded to any move that might threaten their political status, even if implemented by Britain. In the current phase of the Troubles, these moves included both the disbanding of the B-Specials of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which Protestants felt was the key bastion of defense against Republican terror, and the use of internment without trial for Protestant as well as Catholic activists. Proscription of Protestant paramilitary groups alarmed Protestants who saw these groups as "defenders." Protestants felt weakened politically by the closing of the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont and the institution of Direct Rule. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 further inflamed Loyalists by providing a mechanism and forum for the Irish Republic to offer its views and ideas on developments in Northern Ireland. All of these political actions heightened Protestant concerns that Protestantism would be undermined and that a paramilitary potential must be maintained.

The Protestant paramilitary activity originated from the Loyalist faction among Protestants who were determined to remain in union with Britain, even if that entailed an

⁷¹ Boulton, 19.

armed violent response against their British brethren. On one hand, such activity certainly included actively combating Republican entities and resources with violence. "...[T]he loyalist paramilitary self-image was based on an explicit contrast with republicans. They were aggressors; loyalists were defenders. They were criminal; loyalists were law-abiding. They were murdering scum who killed women and children; loyalists were decent family men who could never do such a thing."⁷² On the other hand, Loyalists claim their approach to the Crown depends on the Crown's policies and whether those policies affect the status quo. Loyalists are those

...Protestants who have opposed concessions to the Catholic minority, condemned links between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, and resisted Westminster's attempts to enforce political change. Though they have disagreed about the limits of justified resistance, they have all seen loyalty to elected governments as conditional. In their view, Stormont and Westminster governments have been disloyal to the Protestant ideals they were founded to uphold, and must be recalled to the 'true' principles of their 'glorious past'.⁷³

Numerous groups have been organized since the late 1960s due to perceived threats from the Republican activists as well as from concerns that concessions in British policy would pave the way for Catholics to eventually overrun the Protestant legacy in Northern Ireland. These paramilitary groups believed that they were most often acting in the interests of the state, but in a different uniform. They felt that a precedent existed in the history of the Northern Ireland conflict to form unofficial groups to protect and defend Protestant concerns:

The shipyard workers who expelled Catholics from the yards in 1920 were declaring that unofficial groups had a right to take armed action against the 'rebels', and should not be

⁷² Bruce, 53-54.

⁷³ Nelson, 9-10.

punished by a Protestant government. Many modern loyalist paramilitaries have believed likewise.⁷⁴

Many Loyalists believed that attack was the best form of defense, and that the imperative of ensuring Northern Ireland's survival justified any illegalities:

...[P]rotestant violence has been defended as 'constitutional' on the ground that, unlike the violence of the IRA, it seeks to uphold the protestant state by law established. The men of the UVF, new and old, knew that their actions were 'illegal', but they would have vehemently denied that they were 'unconstitutional'. As, in extremes, they were prepared to fight Britain to stay British, so they were prepared to break the law in order to defend it.⁷⁵

Support from the Protestant community for paramilitary groups fluctuates depending on the perceived threat to the community and, thus, the apparent need for armed, but irregular forces. Since the Loyalist groups are 'pro-state' terrorist forces, they compete with state security forces on grounds such as recruitment, popularity, or support. The Protestant community feels that the more successful state forces are against Republican terror in an official capacity, the less the need for active paramilitary units to commit acts of violence outside the bounds of formal law-and-order practices.

Loyalist paramilitaries themselves like to justify their activities by claiming that their organizations must respond with violence in order to help state forces. In essence, they feel they are doing the same job, but in different uniforms. Steve Bruce further explained the relationship between the need for increased paramilitary activity based on a lack of successful government efforts against Republican terror:

The idea of 'filling a gap' is central both to the motives of those who joined and to persuading people outside the paramilitaries to support the volunteers; the success and

⁷⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁵ Boulton, 59.

survival of the UDA and UVF are thus intimately connected to the operations of the security forces. At one extreme range of possibilities, there may be little space for paramilitary initiatives because the security forces are seen to be doing the job. At the other, there may be considerable support for vigilant activity because the sense of being abandoned is widespread. Potential for paramilitary activity thus depends on the balance⁷⁶ between a sense of threat and perceptions of the competence of the security forces.

F. PROPAGANDA, EXTERNAL SUPPORT, AND ARMS

As part of the 'pro-state' notion, Loyalist publications and propaganda can provide some insights into strategic views and the sense of identity. The titles of several paramilitary periodicals – *Ulster*, *The Defender*, and *Combat* – help illustrate Protestant views regarding Northern Ireland and their role in its survival. The message in recruiting materials is normally fairly clear regarding the threat and the correct Protestant response. For example, three days after the announcement of the policy on internment, Protestants grew increasingly uneasy about their political position now that they shared a certain status with Republicans. It was one of those developments that has the potential in Northern Ireland to strike enough fear in Protestants that able-bodied individuals rally to organize the defense of their faith and independence. A leaflet was circulated at that time in Protestant sections of Belfast that called for volunteers and defenders:

Being convinced that the enemies of the Faith and Freedom are determined to destroy the State of Northern Ireland and thereby enslave the people of God, we call on all members of our loyalist institutions, and other responsible citizens, to organize themselves *immediately*⁷⁷ into platoons of twenty under the command of someone capable of acting as sergeant.

⁷⁶ Bruce, 199.

⁷⁷ Martin Dillon and Denis Lehane, *Political Murder in Northern Ireland* (London: Penguin, 1973), 51.

This appeal also shows a readiness to mobilize quickly in response to the changing security environment. Following a period of increased IRA violence in 1971, more and more Protestants felt vulnerable as the safety of their communities appeared in question. The first edition of a UDA newsletter captured the emotion and urgency at that time:

We are concerned for our Protestant people and the protection of our homes and local shopping centres, the loss of life, the maiming of men, women and children for life...We are dedicated and pledged to uphold the Constitution of our beloved Ulster, to honour the forces of our beloved Majesty the Queen. This we will maintain, if the force of law and order cannot give or afford us immediate protection, we the Protestant people...will defend to our utmost our Protestant heritage and we will never surrender to the murdering scum, the rebels.⁷⁸

A paramilitary recruiting brochure distributed in a Belfast factory in the mid-1980s said the following:

The battle lines are being drawn. We demand the total commitment of all those who oppose republican rule. To those who would contemplate any form of collaboration we issue this solemn and sole warning: If you are not 'for us', then you are certainly 'against us'.⁷⁹

Local support and the propaganda machine within Northern Ireland provide the majority of money and energy necessary to keep the Loyalists employed. The Loyalists have other pockets of support outside Northern Ireland, mostly in Scotland, but also in Canada and South Africa. Through migration, religion, history, and geography, Ulster is tied to Scotland and Scotland to Ulster. Scotland remains the closest ally of Northern Ireland Protestants by providing moral and monetary support to the Loyalists. Support

⁷⁸ Bruce, 47.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 237.

from Scotland reminds Loyalists that they do not stand totally without friends. The support includes meetings held in Scotland that have Loyalist paramilitary ties; fundraising (albeit modest sums); and smuggling of weapons and bomb materials. Probably "...about £100,000 a year is raised through dances, collections, and the sale of loyalist merchandise. Although less than half of what a single bank raid might raise, it is none the less a handy sum."⁸⁰

Most of the support for Ulster Loyalism outside of the United Kingdom comes from Canada: "Ontario is to Ulster Protestants what Boston is to Irish Catholics."⁸¹ As in the case of Scotland, migration has contributed to the strength of this link. Periodically, security forces have detected plans to ship arms from Canada to Northern Ireland. At the very least, small numbers of weapons were probably smuggled from Canada to Loyalists through methods that included the postal service during the 1970s.⁸²

There are emigration ties to South Africa as well, with Ulster Protestants having relocated to South Africa at various points in British colonial history. Steve Bruce also offered a "...contemporary link, in that some South Africans and Ulster Protestants see parallels between their respective positions: a small pool of enlightened civilization surrounded by the hordes of darkness."⁸³ South Africa showed its support through a

⁸⁰ Ibid., 159-165.

⁸¹ Ibid., 168.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 170.

willingness to conduct covert arms sales to representatives of Loyalist paramilitary organizations in the mid-to-late 1980s. Authorities detected plans for at least one large shipment, but were only successful in capturing part of the shipment after it reached Northern Ireland.

With such access to arms, what are the future motives of Protestants in Northern Ireland? Protestant groups form and rise up when they feel that security forces are not doing enough to contain a particular political-military threat: "Any change in political or security circumstances that again gives wide credence to the belief that the state is unwilling to, or incapable of, defending itself will cause a resurgence in support for these organisations or the rise of new forces."⁸⁴ How do Protestants view the future of Northern Ireland and how will their strategic imperatives change, if at all?

The Protestants feel that any change on behalf of the Catholic community would only hurt or lessen the Protestant position. Protestants therefore view many political initiatives aimed to provide more equality for Catholics as a zero-sum game. Any improvement for the Catholic position is seen as detrimental to the Protestant position in society. Protestants are so afraid of the potential Catholic majority and what would happen to their lifestyle if more equality were granted, that they have developed, and cling to, a siege mentality. Painstaking efforts by security forces since 1969 have prevented a broader civil war in Northern Ireland, but Protestants may view future political changes (subsequent to the current peace process) as too drastic and rapid.

⁸⁴ Steve Bruce, *Northern Ireland: Reappraising Loyalist Violence* (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1992), 20.

The elements necessary for continuing Loyalist violence remain. Domestic support exists for Loyalist paramilitaries, albeit at varying levels over time. The paramilitaries receive some external monetary and moral support. Weapons are often available when needed. The emotions remain high as Protestants, especially Loyalist groups, feel they have much to lose in Northern Ireland. Has the last major Loyalist backlash been seen? If political change is driven too quickly, could Loyalists actually be the group to use weapons of mass destruction (such as chemical or biological agents) in Northern Ireland? In a unified Ireland, could the Loyalists take the place of the IRA? With *so* much to lose, more and more Protestants may feel they have *nothing* to lose and may therefore embrace increased levels of violence out of desperation. The identity, ideology, and logic of the Loyalists in Northern Ireland are not as easy to define as some people claim. How strongly the Protestant community will react to future political change remains to be seen. The severity of any Loyalist response probably depends on the pace, timing, and gravity of change.

IV. SECURITY FORCE COLLUSION WITH PROTESTANT PARAMILITARIES

This chapter discusses the matter of collusion between government security forces and Protestant paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. The general substance and origins of Catholic claims regarding collusion are examined. The emotion associated with the conflict in Northern Ireland leads Catholics to believe that any incident that could involve collusion is in fact collusion. Many claims center more on events where collusion cannot be disproved rather than on hard evidence. Some specific incidents are offered as examples. An assessment is made regarding the type of evidence and information that is available regarding collusion. Additionally, this chapter examines whether collusion is policy driven from higher levels in the security force structure or is conducted on a more individual basis. The various motivations for certain groups or individuals to be involved in collusion are also covered.

The Catholic community has claimed widespread collusion between the security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries throughout the current Troubles. The alleged collusion includes logistical help, arms, intelligence and targeting information, and even operational involvement by security force members with Loyalists in acts of violence against the Catholic community. The claims are driven by a variety of explanations. Some say that any Protestant act of violence with a degree of complexity or sophistication (i.e., targeting a specific individual) could not be accomplished by the simple-minded "Prod" paramilitary and would require outside assistance. Other support for the claims

includes a relatively small number of proven incidents where junior members of the security forces were found to have been involved in assisting Loyalist terrorists.

In an atmosphere of folklore, rumor, and myth, as in Northern Ireland, it does not take many of these incidents to suggest to Catholics that many more incidents of violence against Catholics were also facilitated by collusion, and by further extension, that there were policy or institutional mandates to provide such assistance. Although there were some low-level incidents of collusion, that were magnified by the Catholic community, there is a lack of evidence that collusion was sponsored from higher levels in government or that it was widespread. All it takes is a little bit of evidence that suggests collusion in one case for the claim and supposed proof to be then readily transferred by simple association to a separate incident. The contribution of anecdotal material in this regard plays a large part and many stories grow a life of their own. Despite a lack of corroborative information, accounts become "true" enough that their logic is applied to other events with similar circumstances. The myths then grow in severity regarding the scale and scope of government collusion with Loyalists against Catholics and especially Republicans. The occasional exposure of a young part-time UDR soldier involved with a Loyalist group, or of an RUC file on an IRA suspect found in the possession of a Loyalist paramilitary member, keeps the claims alive.

A. ANECDOTES AND EVIDENCE

The amount of anecdotal material about claims of collusion is vast in Northern Ireland. It covers a wide range of activities or actions including the following: police

participation in Protestant mobs with overcoats covering their uniforms and identity; the passing of information on Republican suspects to paramilitary members; agents placed in paramilitary organizations by security forces solely to assist rather than report on them; the passing of weapons and supplies to paramilitaries; and arrangements for police to be absent from a pending crime area or to remove roadblocks to provide quick and safe post-crime exits. Again, many Catholic opinions were formed early on, in the late 1960s when reports suggest that the RUC failed to prevent certain abuse of Catholics and that police often stood idly by during Protestant assaults.⁸⁵

Some specific incidents follow as examples where proof of collusion was lacking, but where the Catholic desire to believe the collusion was stronger than the desire for sufficient evidence. Two UDA men murdered Michael McHugh, a Republican activist, in January 1977. Collusion was suspected by the Catholic community since McHugh previously claimed that members of the security forces verbally threatened his life, and on the night of the murder one of the UDA men had an army map with McHugh's street and house annotated on it.⁸⁶ The map alone did not prove security force sponsorship or assistance, and although no other material or information surfaced that implicated the security forces, the Catholic community viewed this incident as collusion. Sometimes incidents are termed collusive even when security forces do not directly help Loyalists, but perhaps ignore their duty to prevent a crime against Catholics. A well-respected

⁸⁵ Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA: A History* (Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1994), 90.

⁸⁶ Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 207-208.

journalist saw policemen in Belfast merely watch as Protestants torched Catholic-owned businesses.⁸⁷ Loyalist paramilitary members occasionally recounted assistance from security forces during discussions with reporters or during interrogation following their arrest. A top UVF man, Jim Hanna, told a newspaper reporter that a British Army patrol just watched as Hanna and his UVF team better positioned themselves in a gun battle with the IRA. One of Hanna's men shot a young Catholic, but the soldiers present did not arrest anyone. Hanna also claimed that he developed close friendships with army intelligence personnel.⁸⁸

Republican supporters often claimed that Loyalist assassination teams were either directed by army personnel or that soldiers participated jointly with Loyalist paramilitary members in operations. This claim received some attention when a disgruntled British intelligence officer, Colin Wallace, described links (but provided no proof) between security forces and Protestant paramilitary members in relation to the murders of about 30 Catholics in the mid-1970s. Another disgruntled British intelligence officer, Captain Fred Holroyd, made similar claims regarding security force involvement with and support of Protestant paramilitary groups. Holroyd accused the two British civilian intelligence agencies, MI5 and MI6, of sponsoring Loyalist paramilitary teams that bombed Dublin and Monaghan in the Irish Republic in 1974. Holroyd's credibility was less than complete on this account as well as others. He was unable to provide proof of his

⁸⁷ Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War* (London: Arrow Books, 1990), 209.

⁸⁸ Raymond Murray, *The SAS in Ireland* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1990), 74.

allegations. Holroyd also had documented emotional problems and had been found mentally unstable by medical personnel.⁸⁹

Witnesses claimed hearing a British accent amongst the hit squad at the scene of various shootings or murders of Catholics by Protestant paramilitaries. The occasional theft of weapons from security force armories over the years normally brings a claim of collusion as well. Catholics usually insist that security force members desiring to aid the Loyalists facilitated the "break ins." Many fears of collusion stem from cases where sensitive security force information or intelligence materials relating to Republicans was found in the possession of Loyalist paramilitary members or in their homes. The material found included IRA suspect lists, IRA member biographies, photos, addresses, and car information.⁹⁰ It was difficult to determine how the Loyalists acquired the information. Catholics insisted that the material was passed on in accordance with the wishes of security force leadership; however, authorities argued that the material was stolen or that lower-level members of the security forces passed it on on an individual basis.

What is the true level of security force collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries? Is it a case of the security forces using the paramilitaries or the other way around? The paramilitaries certainly used the security forces indirectly by benefiting from the training received by paramilitary members who served at one time or another in the UDR or British Army. However, to say that there is widespread or institutional collusion is

⁸⁹ Ibid., 107-109.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 73.

difficult. Some members of the security forces likely provided support such as information or weapons on an individual basis, or others were hardened enough by the situation that they did not feel compelled to stop Protestant violence or illegal activities. There may be circumstances where security forces assisted or allowed Loyalist violence, but this does not mean that collusion was policy driven. From his years on the scene as a journalist, and with a comparably rare gift for objectivity on the subject, Martin Dillon says "...the overwhelming evidence indicated that such involvement was personal and not part of a stated policy."⁹¹

The suggestion that there was a campaign by the security forces to recruit Loyalist help in defeating the Republican threat by providing intelligence for specific assassinations and acts of violence is not borne out by the relevant statistics. In the ten years between 1977-87, Loyalists killed only four Catholic terrorists. The numbers would likely have been higher if there had been a determined effort to pass on intelligence in order to reduce the IRA force.⁹² The incidents where Security forces have been proven to pass on intelligence to Loyalists mostly involved junior personnel in the RUC, British Army, or UDR, and the information probably did not have significant impact for the Loyalists. Steve Bruce offers the following summation:

The rank and status of those crown force personnel who have helped the UDA and UVF is interesting. Almost all were of very low rank and/or short service and their unsuccessful careers suggest personality or behavioural problems. That is, these are

⁹¹ Ibid., xx.

⁹² Mark Urban, *Big Boys' Rules: The SAS and the Secret Struggle Against the IRA* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 59.

people who left or were forced to resign because, for a variety of reasons, they were not very good soldiers or policemen.⁹³

The army partially recognized the existence of some low-level sharing of information between the police and Loyalists regarding the handling and sharing of intelligence information between the army and the RUC, especially in the RUC's adjustment years of the 1970s. In the mid-1970s, the army leadership and intelligence personnel at Lisburn headquarters in Northern Ireland had concerns about the "safety" of information that was passed to the RUC and that it might be passed along or compromised in some fashion:

This was why the Army would not always tell the police what it was doing. It knew that the Protestant paramilitary units, like the UDA and UVF, actually felt they were helping the Army and had little doubt that many were ex-B Specials with friends in the RUC. After one major raid in which a large number of Protestants were lifted – and about which the police were not informed – relations between the GOC [General Officer Commanding]⁹⁴ and the Chief Constable were very strained for some time.

B. MOTIVATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS FOR COLLUSION

Several factors have contributed to at least some low level of collusion between the security forces and the Loyalists. One is the predominately Protestant nature of the RUC and the UDR, as well as the poor vetting process within the UDR that has allowed active Loyalist paramilitary members to join the regiment. More importantly and more widespread, however, is the threat that the IRA has posed over the last 30 years and the impact that has had on the lives and families of security force members who were well

⁹³ Steve Bruce, *Northern Ireland: Reappraising Loyalist Violence* (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1992), 14.

⁹⁴ Desmond Hamill, *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland, 1969-1984* (London: Methuen, 1985), 177.

targeted by the IRA. This constant threat and the bitterness that can develop with loss of friends and family to realizations of that threat would logically lead many normally upstanding individuals at least to turn a blind eye on occasion if not actually provide assistance in the targeting of a known IRA killer. Perhaps some individuals were even afraid to intervene against fellow Protestants for fear of retaliation or becoming an outcast. Martin Dillon offers the following comment:

I would say that available evidence indicates there was a small percentage of individuals within both forces who were willing to allow and encourage Loyalist violence and others who were too terrified to be perceived as preventing it.⁹⁵

Many of the ideas about collusion stem from events, observations, and opinions formed very early in the Troubles. Bad impressions were formed that have lasted and have been tough to overcome. Protestant groups often flaunted their power and influence through large parades (some with significant paramilitary presence) and by establishing vigilante networks in communities that were devoid of police oversight or interference. The police did not often disband or attempt to control much of this provocative and militant activity since it had so much violent Republican activity to worry about. Dillon describes the situation of the early 1970s:

[the UDA]...showed its numerical strength by holding huge parades in Belfast with men hooded and dressed in combat gear. The sight of such large numbers of paramilitaries marching openly on the streets without hindrance from the police or Army served to frighten Catholics and convince them that the security forces were either afraid to confront the UDA or prepared to allow them to act as the policing agent in Protestant areas.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Dillon, 209.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 252.

Perhaps the security forces, including the British Army, were so concerned about spiraling Republican violence and escalation to civil war that some members did not want to levy too many regulations on the Protestant community. A story from one soldier at the time seems to support this conclusion:

A soldier remembered being told that his patrols were not to go into two buildings on the Shankill Road – the UDA headquarters and the Orange Hall. He did not know the reason, but thought that maybe the authorities wanted to keep the Protestants happy and stop them shooting at soldiers. Perhaps, he thought, they wanted to make sure that if civil war broke out the Protestants would have the means to fight it.⁹⁷

Not as many British soldiers, it seems, were willing to look the other way. One British soldier recalls:

I was in an attic next door to the Orange Hall one day and found a door that...led directly into the hall. 'To hell with it!' I said to my men, and opened the door. Well! It was all very embarrassing. Stacked neatly against the wall in this Orange Hall attic were nineteen super-duper ex-Army SLRs [self-loading rifles] and a great deal of ammunition.⁹⁸

The close community ties between members of the security forces, especially the RUC, have also cast many doubts about objectivity. The police in Northern Ireland have been accused of favoring Protestants; the militarized policing was most often directed at the Catholic community. Catholics often accuse the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) of this bias, especially during the most recent troubles in Northern Ireland since the mid-1960s. (The RUC is over 90 percent Protestant; not many Catholics join the RUC for

⁹⁷ Hamill, 164.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

fear of assassination by Republicans.)⁹⁹ Catholics perceived the RUC as the protector of the Protestant majority and the Unionist government.

The police tend to live in Protestant areas where they feel more comfortable and safe. They naturally socialize in Protestant circles and belong to Protestant groups such as the Orange Order. It would be difficult to disrupt the attitudes formed through these social circles, but there have been a few security force members who used poor judgement in socializing with paramilitary-associated individuals or in paramilitary-associated establishments. Moreover, there was both a lack of institutional guidance on this issue and a lack of any formalized effort by the authorities to manage public relations and impressions carefully in this regard.

Unfortunately, some members of the RUC were not reluctant to frequent Loyalist clubs and bars in Northern Ireland. Even though certain places were known UDA or UVF hangouts, this did not often discourage the police from socializing in them. Thus, the fact that these places were used for paramilitary meetings, operational planning, and beatings, did not paint a very good picture for a police force that was trying to protect its image in a highly emotional and divisive conflict. Policy could have made such places off limits to RUC members early on. In retrospect however, this was not as significant a problem later, as it was in the 1970s.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ John D. Brewer, *Inside the RUC: Routine Policing in a Divided Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 138.

¹⁰⁰ Dillon, 253-254.

The Loyalist paramilitaries, however, have never objected to any accusations against them of close association with the security forces. The UDA and UVF were not reluctant to acknowledge assistance from the security forces because they felt it helped legitimize their mission. The paramilitary groups enjoyed being accused of being tied closely with state forces. They felt that they were fighting for the same cause. Loyalist groups attempted to show legitimacy for their operations by displaying state-provided intelligence or making public admissions about cooperation with the security forces.¹⁰¹

C. COLLUSION AND THE ULSTER DEFENSE REGIMENT

Some of the most significant accusations of collusion involve the Ulster Defense Regiment. The UDR was formed, with some optimism, to replace the B-Specials of the RUC. The regiment was initially composed of about 20 percent Catholics, but this eventually dwindled to less than 10 percent as Catholic members were threatened and as the reputation of the regiment deteriorated among Catholics. Relying heavily on local recruitment, it was eventually viewed by Catholics as a mere carryover from the Specials.¹⁰²

Many paramilitary members joined the UDR to get training and access to equipment, intelligence, etc. The UDR never employed the entrance controls and the screening process necessary to prevent the wrong people from entering. Also, it was legal for some time to be in both the UDR and the UDA simultaneously, since the UDA was

¹⁰¹ Bruce, *Northern Ireland: Reappraising Loyalist Violence*, 13.

¹⁰² Urban, 15-16.

not proscribed until 1992. The paramilitary groups actually encouraged their members to join the UDR so as to gain access to weapons and information. The UDR, like the paramilitary groups, was also interpreted among some Loyalists as existing to defend the Protestant community and Northern Ireland's survival by resisting any Republican challenges.

Like the RUC, UDR members were intended targets of the IRA. The daily threat to their existence, routine, and families was similar, if not worse, than that against the RUC.¹⁰³ Many UDR members were even targeted at their homes and killed in front of their families. Many were also vulnerable because they were part-time UDR members who lived in rural areas unable to hide their association with the regiment or to protect their homes very well. Over 150 members were killed between the regiment's formation in 1969 and 1986 (129 of them were off duty at the time of their assassination).¹⁰⁴

The Republican threat against the UDR may partially explain why many of the instances where a member of the security forces was involved in illegal activities or paramilitary-associated violence, he was a member of the Ulster Defense Regiment. The British Army even recognized the nature of collusion present in Northern Ireland, specifically regarding the UDR:

The notion that the UDR and RUC contain men and women whose loyalty is to the principle of Protestant hegemony in Ulster rather than to the rule of law finds currency at many levels within the Army. During the early 1970s soldiers often found that loyalist paramilitaries had been tipped off prior to raids...The Army's classified training manual for intelligence specialists bound for Ulster in the late 1970s noted with a candour absent

¹⁰³ Dillon, 210-11.

¹⁰⁴ Urban, 187.

from its public pronouncements: 'Units must be aware of the fact that, in some instances, the UDR has been penetrated by extremist loyalist organizations, and this will affect the permissible limit of intelligence dissemination, particularly in relation to Protestant extremist activities'.¹⁰⁵

D. THE MIAMI SHOWBAND MASSACRE

The participation of UDR members in forms of collusion (including violence and murder) with Loyalist paramilitaries was well represented in the Miami Showband Massacre. In July of 1975, a five-member Catholic pop-music band from the Republic of Ireland was enjoying a warm reception in Northern Ireland. They were appreciated for their willingness and ability to cross political boundaries and appeal to mixed crowds in the north. The UVF, however, with the help of several UDR members, planned to involve the Miami Showband in a concocted conspiracy that would tarnish the band's reputation and lead to the death of the band members.

As the band was returning to the Republic following a show in Northern Ireland, the band's van was stopped at what appeared to be a military roadblock north of the border. The UVF gang intended to plant a bomb under a seat in the van that would later detonate once the van was in the Republic. The hope was that the explosion would discredit the band and show that the border was too porous, allowing Republicans to move explosives across the border easily. As the band members were being harassed by the group of armed men (a mix of UVF and UDR members) outside the van, several of the UVF men were placing the explosive device in the van when it prematurely detonated, killing several UVF men and several band members. The remaining

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 51.

paramilitary tried to kill the band's remaining survivors, but two managed to survive and provide details of the event and descriptions of several men. It led to the implication of four (part-time and full-time) UDR members as part of this UVF operation. Stories such as this one encouraged conspiracy theories that there was broader and sanctioned involvement from higher up in the security forces and that there were obvious links to intelligence entities.¹⁰⁶

What motivates a member of the security forces to help Loyalist paramilitaries? An individual may join the RUC or the UDA for the same reason – to resist the total societal disruption caused by a Republican onslaught. Despite the fact that the security force organizations intensively socialize new accessions to their ranks and cultivate a loyalty to that specific institution, there are still some individuals who have difficulty ignoring other compelling ties, emotions, or bitterness which have built up through a life of constant exposure to unpredictable and senseless violence.¹⁰⁷ Reflecting the extent of the emotion, one police officer commented: “The price of human life is now so cheap in Belfast, that you can have old scores settled for the price of a few bottles of Guinness.”¹⁰⁸

For a member of the security forces, life is always under threat from Republicans and one can never really relax. Police and soldiers have always had to remain on guard, changing routines and routes, and checking homes and automobiles. The mere threat of

¹⁰⁶ Dillon, 212-220.

¹⁰⁷ Steve Bruce, “The Problems of ‘Pro-State’ Terrorism: Loyalist Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 73.

¹⁰⁸ Hamill, 191.

personal attacks and attacks on one's family and friends, not to mention actual murders, put a rather large strain on an individual. It is not hard to see why, following years of such an abusive environment, even a reputable public servant might become embittered enough to pass information along to Loyalists to facilitate an assassination, possibly in pursuit of revenge. At times this mentality can probably be best characterized by the belief that the enemy of an enemy must be a friend.

Many Protestants in Northern Ireland are anti-Republican because of the Republican violence and the threat to them that a united Ireland poses. Many are also strong unionists in the political sense. These feelings also naturally reside in some members of the security forces who would prefer aggressive action taken against the IRA, but who feel restrained by their professional standing. It was difficult to resist the temptation to allow Loyalist activities, especially among younger and more junior members of the forces. Eventually this feeling carried over to the British Army as well. It was harassed and targeted by Republicans relentlessly over the years, and often the only safe moments or areas for them were in Protestant communities. Most of the security force personnel that were killed in the 20 years between 1969-89 were killed by Catholic terrorists (847 of 876).¹⁰⁹

Many assertions are still made that there were numerous and strong ties between security forces and paramilitaries. Not all these assertions can be backed up with hard evidence, but there is a lot of hearsay and circumstantial evidence. Sometimes it is quite

¹⁰⁹ Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 214-215.

easy to make a strong, *suggestive* case or cases, but the hard facts are elusive and, as Steve Bruce says, "It is no easy matter to shift from anecdote to some sort of objective evaluation of collusion between the security forces and loyalist paramilitaries."¹¹⁰ The volume of claims alone would lead a new student of the subject to believe that a high level of collusion must exist, but more accurately, the fact is that "...the same claims are frequently repeated."¹¹¹ Steve Bruce suggests that the continuous and popular claims that there is collusion stems less from actual evidence to support this claim, and more from the following fact:

...(a) critics of the security forces *expect* them to be colluding and (b) critics of loyalist paramilitaries suppose them incapable of organising anything more complicated than the simplest sectarian killing without professional help.¹¹²

Many myths, stories, and accusations about security force collusion in Northern Ireland share suggestive evidence or unclear elements. However, the common denominator among many of these is that they cannot be disproved, and therefore, develop a life of their own. All these theories, stories, and accusations help fuel the propaganda war and emotion on both sides. Which material receives focus depends on what certain portions of the population want to believe. Objectivity is the last criterion to be used, as these accounts develop into powerful folklore.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 224.

¹¹¹ Bruce, *Northern Ireland: Reappraising Loyalist Violence*, 13.

¹¹² Ibid., 13.

V. BRITISH INTELLIGENCE AND THE UDA: THE CASE OF DOUBLE AGENT BRIAN NELSON

The techniques and methods used by the security forces in operations against Republicans have been discussed in much of the literature on the conflict. Although less has been written on security force operations against Loyalist groups, it is likely that many of the same techniques and methods were used against these Protestant paramilitaries. Indeed, British intelligence did cover the range of options available to counter Protestant terrorism. British officers employed surveillance, paid informers, obtained information through interrogations, and infiltrated paramilitary groups with agents. One such case involved Brian Nelson, a British Army agent who was a member of the Ulster Defense Association (UDA). This chapter discusses his tenure as the UDA's intelligence officer, the value and danger of agent operations, Nelson's demise at the hands of the courts, and some questions regarding the ethics of government sponsorship of agents.

A. BACKGROUND

The Troubles in Northern Ireland have seen many forms of intelligence collection. Ulster has been a great testing ground for various collection means and methods. However, the use of informers and agents normally provides one of the best methods of intelligence gathering in the conflict. Much of the intelligence related to the paramilitaries in Northern Ireland is human-acquired intelligence or "humint." A significant amount of the humint-associated information is in fact from informers. The

use of informers is very important to the efforts of the intelligence and security forces and is very sensitive due to the possible loss of life and key sources. However, full development of these resources is also tough within the confines of a liberal democracy. For a government security force, it is problematic to plant an agent of its own (police officer, army soldier) since they will likely be embroiled in illegal activities.¹¹³ The focus, therefore, is on finding ways to recruit effectively the right people outside the government organization or within the target organization.

Determining the best ways to use the new sources and volume of information is another challenge. Often there are pieces available to many different puzzles, but not enough to formulate a large, solid case that would place a significant dent in a particular group. The use of informers can be very useful in going after large numbers of a certain group when their information is combined with information obtained by other means that was perhaps valuable, but insufficient for various reasons.

The security forces needed informers on both sides of the conflict. Thus, the army recruited Brian Nelson as the UDA became more active. The UDA's use of political violence increased in the late 1980s. During this time, a new generation of leaders took over the UDA and popular support for their actions increased, due to growing fears

¹¹³ Steven Greer, *Supergrasses: A Study in Anti-Terrorist Law Enforcement in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 11.

among Protestants that the IRA's "Armalite and ballot box" strategy had effectively advanced the Republican cause.¹¹⁴ Since the late 1980s, the UDA has grown in influence:

[It]...has reemerged as a highly dangerous force capable of influencing political events and challenging the security forces. Although until recently rarely acknowledged in official circles, an active and effective UDA (with other loyalist paramilitaries) probably represents as great a threat to the security of Northern Ireland as republican violence.¹¹⁵

The UDA resurgence in the late 1980s warranted additional measures by the security forces. An effective intelligence effort was also required to help the security forces implement the government's counterterrorism policies. An intelligence agent placed inside of the UDA could provide valuable information and insight into terrorist plans and activities. This information would be valuable in containing and preventing UDA violence. However, penetration or agent placement in the UDA, or any organization, is a delicate operation. The Protestant community and its paramilitary groups were naturally easier to penetrate than Catholic organizations, but placing an agent in a key functional or leadership position within the paramilitary unit was more difficult. Managing such an agent would be challenging, but the return on investment could be considerable. The agent chosen for this operation was Brian Nelson.

B. BRIAN NELSON: RECRUITMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Brian Nelson was born in Northern Ireland in 1948. Following a stint with the Black Watch regiment and a medical discharge from the British Army in 1971, he joined

¹¹⁴ Steve Bruce, "Loyalists in Northern Ireland: Further Thoughts on 'Pro-State Terror,'" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 255-263.

¹¹⁵ Jim Cusack and Max Taylor, "Resurgence of a Terrorist Organisation – Part 1: The UDA, a Case Study," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 2.

the UDA in 1972. This was not unusual, as the ranks of Protestant paramilitary organizations have always been full of ex-servicemen. Nelson was involved in a UDA operation in 1973 in which he and his team tried to kidnap a Catholic man who was not associated with Republican terrorism. Nelson was caught, convicted, and sent to prison from 1974 to 1977. He rejoined the UDA after his release from prison and by 1983 had volunteered or been recruited by the British Army to act as an informer. The details of this early part of the relationship between Nelson and the Army are not yet publicly available. The UDA used him in an intelligence role against Republicans until he unexplainably left Northern Ireland in 1985 and resettled in Germany. The army subsequently contacted Nelson in Germany around 1987 and encouraged him to have a second try as an army agent.¹¹⁶

Nelson agreed to the army request and rejoined the UDA in August 1987. He was eventually appointed as the intelligence chief of the UDA.¹¹⁷ His army handlers must have been thrilled at this development. Such a position would naturally provide valuable insights into paramilitary plans. It would also provide them with the ability to influence the selection and conduct of UDA operations. For Nelson to maintain an important position within the organization, however, he would have to perform well in that role. His army handlers, known as the Field Research Unit (FRU), likely provided that

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁷ John Ware and Geoff Seed with Alasdair Palmer, "Focus the Army and the Death Squads," *Sunday Telegraph* (Belfast), 29 March 1998, 22. Reportedly, the British Army paid Nelson £28,000 a year for his role as an agent. Nelson was probably paid for three or four years, although the exact duration of time in which he received this amount is unknown.

assistance in the form of security force intelligence and materials relating to Republican paramilitaries. Such information would have boost Nelson's reputation and credibility within the UDA, but Nelson appears to have performed well at his job regardless. Nelson maintained an intelligence "database" on individuals of interest with the help of various sources. This database was known as "P" or "Personality" cards and was used throughout the organization to choose targets. According to an army handler, it was also the vehicle for ensuring that at least the "right" people were targeted (i.e., those clearly associated with terrorism and not just innocent Catholics).¹¹⁸

Fellow UDA members recall Nelson as very thorough and meticulous, although a bit nervous. Some even suggest that Nelson's role as a British agent was known within the UDA. The information and photographs obtained by Nelson's intelligence branch were of such high quality that suspicions about Nelson's sources emerged. A fellow UDA member interrogated Nelson at least once in 1988, but not very effectively as Nelson was supported during the inquiry by the UDA brigadier in West Belfast.¹¹⁹ Nelson was allowed to remain as intelligence chief in spite of the rumors about his connections with the security forces.

Nelson was able to provide his army handlers with a significant amount of valuable information that both saved lives and prevented the successful completion of numerous paramilitary operations. With Nelson's access to UDA plans and operations

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Cusack and Taylor, 15-16.

during his UDA membership from 1987 on, "...the British Army may at some stages have had almost complete access to information about the inner workings of the military wing of the UDA from Nelson's weekly reports. The security services must have been able to use this intelligence to reduce the UDA's military activity."¹²⁰

Although full details of Nelson's activities in the UDA were never disclosed,¹²¹ the army claimed that information that Nelson relayed enabled the RUC and the army to foil various Loyalist operations such as assassinations, beatings, kidnappings, and robberies. Reportedly, Nelson even tipped the authorities on possible assassination attempts of public figures such as Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams. During Nelson's second trial in 1991, a senior military intelligence officer associated with the FRU, known as "Colonel J" for trial purposes, testified that Nelson passed on to him inside information on the UDA on a regular (weekly) basis:

As a result of his Unit's meetings with Nelson, Colonel J said that 730 intelligence reports had been passed on to Special Branch [RUC], reports which identified threats to 217 individuals and which, he said, helped to save their lives.¹²²

Nelson's placement would help the security forces with another critical concern, that of arms transfers and deliveries. In a conflict such as that of Northern Ireland, the flow of weapons from external sources into the hands of belligerents greatly determines

¹²⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹²¹ General information about Nelson's role as a double agent only became available during an investigation into security force collusion with Protestant paramilitaries. The investigation, known as the Stevens Inquiry, will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹²² Ware, Seed, and Palmer, 22.

the scope and intensity of the conflict. The more illegal weapons that enter the country and the more sophisticated those weapons are, the more difficult it is for security forces to maintain peace or to defend themselves. In Northern Ireland, it was not just the IRA that was trying to acquire weapons from such sources as Libya; Loyalist paramilitaries also shopped the global market to build their arsenal. The Loyalists considered an arsenal necessary to defend their communities and conduct terrorist actions. They also wanted a contingency stockpile of arms in the event of large-scale violence or civil war. One such arms delivery to the Loyalists came from South Africa in 1988, but was partially interdicted by security forces in Northern Ireland.

This large arms shipment from South Africa was financed through bank robberies and other criminal activities led by the UDA. Estimates value the shipment at roughly £150,000 (roughly \$240,000). Included in the package were several hundred assault rifles and handguns, ammunition, ten RPG-7 grenade launchers (with 150 rounds), and hundreds of fragmentation grenades.¹²³ The arms were divided up in North Armagh between three Loyalist paramilitary groups: the UDA, the UVF, and the Ulster Resistance. The UDA members that retrieved their share of the shipment were arrested by the RUC on their return trip from the hiding sight.¹²⁴

An informant arguably made the apparently fortuitous interception by the police of such a sensitive operation possible in one of the paramilitary groups. This arms

¹²³ Cusack and Taylor, 6.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 12.

delivery operation would have been guarded very carefully within the UDA, but Brian Nelson was in a position to provide that tip to the authorities. If the police had raided the hiding site instead, it would have suggested to the paramilitaries that one of their select members with knowledge of the operation had leaked the information. Normally, some sort of middle ground is sought by intelligence agencies in situations where both the mission and the survival of the source are critical. An arms delivery was naturally of great interest to the government authorities, but so was the protection and longevity of a well-placed agent like Brian Nelson. It is plausible that the RUC's interception of just one segment of the shipment was an attempt to reach the middle ground in this situation, with the hope of prying additional information out of the captured UDA members about the shipment.

C. NELSON'S DEMISE

Nelson's role as an agent and valuable contributor, however, would come to an end and with serious penalty following the launch of the Stevens Inquiry in 1989 into security force collusion with paramilitaries. As the Stevens investigation progressed and more evidence was collected, more paramilitary members were arrested. By piecing evidence together and interrogating UDA members, the Stevens team eventually stumbled onto Nelson.

Brian Nelson, if left in place, would also have been in danger of being arrested as a member of the UDA. Nelson and his handlers discussed this contingency. Reportedly, Nelson was not to reveal his association with the army and to deny it, if it was in fact

brought up during interrogation. It appears that perhaps his handlers were both aware and comfortable with the fact that he might go to prison. Their handlers often deem informants, especially low-level ones, expendable. Nelson, however, held a key position in the UDA and had been a valuable source.

Some questions arise. Why did the handlers not just cut their losses and pull Nelson out to a safe location or new existence? If he went to jail, a valuable source would have been lost for a considerable amount of time, but if he was removed to a safe location, he could perhaps have been reintroduced within the UDA at a later date. Why did they leave him in place to face a potential outcome that could both harm both him and the army's role in Northern Ireland? If Nelson's army association were revealed following his arrest, the Republican community would have suggested that Nelson was the army's means to help the Protestant paramilitaries. On the other hand, many Protestants would have been offended by the army's attempt to penetrate and deceive one of their organizations. Increased Protestant awareness of army efforts in this regard would have made it more difficult to recruit agents and penetrate paramilitary groups in the future. Indeed, there was some early concern in the FRU about the investigation and its consequences: during the first week of the Stevens investigation the FRU confiscated the library of "P" cards that Nelson had built since the cards would have shown a link to the security forces.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Ware, Seed, and Palmer, 22.

Unfortunately, security force documents that the Stevens team captured from the UDA were found to have Nelson's fingerprints on them. This led to Nelson's planned arrest for 11 January 1990. Interestingly, Nelson slipped away to England on the night of 10 January, perhaps in response to a tip from his handlers. Nelson returned from England later that month for unknown reasons, at which time he was finally arrested. He was "...charged with aiding and abetting the murder of two men in 1988, conspiracy to murder four others and 26 counts of possessing information useful to terrorists."¹²⁶ Subsequent legal proceedings determined that although Nelson was operating undercover on behalf of the government, he must answer to the law. Why was he brought back into the country without a good plan to soften the blow he would receive? The army handlers certainly should have removed Brian Nelson before the roof caved in on him, but some suggest that his arrest "...may in fact have been an error resulting from poor coordination between various arms of the British security services in Northern Ireland."¹²⁷

Nelson admitted his role as an Army agent to the investigation team. The Stevens team demanded and eventually got all the FRU documents that were pertinent to the case involving Nelson, such as the "contact" forms which handlers use to log agent interactions and developments. No army or police personnel, however, were arrested for passing on information to the paramilitary members.¹²⁸ Nelson pleaded guilty to lesser

¹²⁶ Cusack and Taylor, 14.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹²⁸ Ware, Seed, and Palmer, 22.

charges in order to avoid stiffer sentencing: five charges of conspiracy to murder, possession of a machine gun, three charges of collecting information useful to terrorists, and 11 counts of possessing documents useful to terrorists. Mark Urban points out that “[c]rown lawyers dropped two murder counts at the last minute, leading to claims of a deal whereby Nelson pleaded guilty to [those] lesser charges to prevent details of his secret work becoming public.”¹²⁹ In February 1992, he was sentenced to ten years in prison.

D. AFTERMATH AND ASSESSMENT

Brian Nelson’s illegal actions as a terrorist in the UDA may have been accepted by fellow paramilitaries and many Protestants, but Nelson’s role as an army agent has received some criticism, by observers both inside and outside of Ireland, since he was acting on behalf of the government. In his role as the UDA’s intelligence officer, he undoubtedly helped plan numerous murders by identifying targets and supplying necessary information on IRA suspects with photos, descriptions, addresses, etc. He also probably instructed members on surveillance techniques necessary for successful operations. Some see this as government sponsorship of those activities.¹³⁰

What was Nelson’s long-term role and fate in the army’s view? Although Nelson’s position provided important information to security force efforts, holding a senior UDA position would implicate him in most things the paramilitary unit would do.

¹²⁹ Mark Urban, *Big Boys’ Rules: The SAS and the Secret Struggle Against the IRA* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 216.

From the army's viewpoint, Nelson could try to relay information in order to discourage or avert indiscriminate sectarian killings. However, since he could not single-handedly bring the organization to a close, he would naturally have to be cognizant of a certain amount of murderous activity that the organization would carry out whether he was there or not. If the violence were to take place regardless of Nelson's presence, the most that Nelson could do was to make sure the UDA went after the right person and did not make any mistakes in that regard:

When confronted by what his own unit's records revealed about Nelson's motives, Colonel J admitted that he had recruited Nelson in order to persuade the UDA to concentrate its assassination attempts on republican terrorists. But Colonel J claimed that the whole point of that policy was to save lives. Organising the assassination of Provisional IRA activists took the UDA longer than 'the ad hoc targeting of Catholics.' That would enable his unit to forewarn Special Branch [RUC] of the people who were in danger – which would, the Colonel claimed, give the RUC time to prepare 'counter-measures'.¹³¹

Following Nelson's trial and other findings from the Stevens Inquiry, some in Northern Ireland pointed to a conspiracy between security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries to conduct a joint campaign against Republicans. The allegations were quite severe and continue to appear in current literature. The suggestion is that Nelson and others were in place more to help the UDA receive and process information than they were to report on and help contain the UDA. Steve Bruce, however, disagrees:

Although the Nelson case raises important issues of the morality of undercover operations, it is very difficult to construe it as a case of the army helping the UDA when Nelson provided regular briefings on the UDA and finally shopped his colleagues.¹³²

¹³⁰ Ware, Seed, and Palmer, 22.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Steve Bruce, *Northern Ireland: Reappraising Loyalist Violence* (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1992), 13.

The irony of such claims is that Nelson helped curb UDA activities, and his departure from the UDA impaired security force capabilities against Loyalist paramilitaries. The damage of his imprisonment played out in the early 1990s when Loyalist terror increased significantly.¹³³

¹³³ Cusack and Taylor, 18.

VI. CONCLUSION

Protestant paramilitaries have been an important element in the Northern Ireland conflict over the last thirty years. Perhaps observers, both inside and outside Ireland, did not understand Protestant paramilitarism or fear it as much as Republican violence. This lack of understanding or fear may explain why the subject received less attention than it deserved. The amount of Loyalist violence over the last thirty years has been significant and some claim that concern for the threat was insufficient.

You could read books about Republican heroes or the secret army; volumes on the nature of the Irish were annual events. Everyone knew of the real Irish, the romantic IRA, the Irish rebels, none cared to learn about the Orangemen. No knowledge was to prove a dangerous thing.¹³⁴

Protestant paramilitaries were active from the start of the current Troubles and in fact initiated some of the first assassinations and bombings. The modern paramilitaries, such as the UDA and the UVF, claim they were reacting to a growing Republican threat to their homes and families. However, precedents already existed in the history of Ireland that motivated Protestants to react with armed responses to any Catholic efforts toward political equality. The UDA, UVF, and other Protestant paramilitaries just carried this tradition through in the last three decades.

Despite their size, longevity, and violent impact, the Protestant paramilitaries never successfully centralized their authority or commanded the professional respect that

¹³⁴ J. Bowyer Bell, *The Gun in Politics: An Analysis of Irish Political Conflict 1916-1986* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1987), 344.

the Republican terrorists did. The sectarian nature of Loyalist violence, its rampant criminal activity, and internal paramilitary disputes all affected the professional reputation of the Protestant groups. However, Protestant paramilitary groups remained active despite their shortcomings. Elements of a Protestant strategic culture helped sustain the paramilitary groups and their activity. Protestants feared giving an inch to Catholics just to lose a mile in terms of political power. Protestants targeted Catholics in an effort to resist a united Ireland and in order to stay British. It was an important heritage that resisted not only rapid change, but any change at all. Protestants not only targeted Republicans, but also innocent civilians (Protestant and Catholic), fellow Loyalists, and even the British Army.

Were security force efforts against Loyalist paramilitaries sufficient given the nature and level of Protestant violence? As pro-state forces, the Loyalists were an easier organization to penetrate using fellow Protestants in the security forces, but the security forces faced a formidable threat in the IRA, which took much of their attention and resources. They were probably not able to run two separate campaigns against Republicans and Loyalists in the early stages of the Troubles when manpower, effective tactics, and a viable intelligence structure were lacking. The security forces had their hands full containing the IRA and could not afford a two-front war.

Perhaps it is true that the security forces did not focus on the Loyalists due to a lack of respect for those Protestant groups, or due to a lack of resources, but any effort against the IRA that was shifted toward Protestant groups could nevertheless have led to a more violent Protestant response. If security forces had decreased their efforts against

Republicans to accommodate increased efforts against Protestants, Republican activities would also likely have increased. A more active and effective anti-state force such as the IRA can encourage increased efforts on the part of pro-state forces like the Protestant paramilitaries. If the security forces had shifted resources toward the Protestant threat, it might have permitted additional IRA successes, thereby increasing the Protestant resolve. Both the Catholic and the Protestant paramilitary groups might have become more violent for a period of time while the security forces made adjustments. Too much effort on the pro-state group instead of the anti-state group could have led to an upward spiral where both sets of paramilitaries, Protestant and Catholic, increase their activities and violence. Some military leaders recognized the potential for a horrific Protestant backlash if IRA violence got out of control:

The Protestant areas had their own, particular atmosphere. Apart from the personal danger to soldiers, the commanders in East Belfast were more frightened that 10,000-15,000 Protestants marching in the centre of the area would produce a bloodbath than that the IRA would ever produce one. Protestant mobs were, they felt, always much more unpleasant.¹³⁵

Whether the security forces focused enough attention on Protestant paramilitaries is difficult to determine. Given the extent of the Republican threat and the challenge to the status quo, government officials assessed Republican groups as the number-one priority for the security forces. One could argue that more resources and force could have been applied against the Protestant groups, but the balance of effort provided by the British Army and the RUC did prevent a bloodier civil war. However, even if previous

¹³⁵ Desmond Hamill, *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland, 1969-1984* (London: Methuen, 1985), 129.

levels of effort against Protestant groups had been deemed sufficient, that should not have dismissed the potential benefits from continued or expanded efforts against the Protestant groups. As the peace process in Northern Ireland continues to unfold, Protestant paramilitaries may respond with more violence.

Loyalists do not trust Republican declarations or intentions. Some Protestants feel that any lull in Republican activity is disingenuous. Thus, attempts at political reform may be frustrated by Loyalist reluctance to cooperate. To many Loyalists, "...even extended periods of peace could never be anything other than a ploy to lull loyalists into a false sense of security."¹³⁶ It is important to continue security force intelligence operations against the Protestant paramilitaries in order to provide insight into changes in attitude and warning about possible operations. The continued and possibly expanded use of agents infiltrating the key Protestant groups would provide valuable information regarding paramilitary plans and goals. If the Protestant community deems political reform associated with the peace process as too rapid, paramilitaries could respond and violently disrupt political progress. Security force efforts to penetrate the Protestant paramilitaries is therefore important in helping protect and advance a delicate peace process.

The study of Protestant paramilitaries is not only important for dealing with the conflict in Northern Ireland, it is also a good way to analyze the use of security and intelligence policies against a particular group in relation to other violent, highly divisive,

¹³⁶ Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 31.

ethnic, and religious conflicts. Political scientists, such as Samuel Huntington, suggest that such ethnic and religious clashes will continue to demand the attention of the United States and other nations concerned with maintaining peace and world order. As these crises and hot spots develop in different regions around the world, the British experiences in Northern Ireland over the last thirty years may provide some valuable policy lessons as nations deal with these emerging conflicts.

Granted, a future conflict in Eurasia, for example, may not wholly resemble the situation in Northern Ireland, nor will a particular faction in any future conflict completely resemble Protestant paramilitaries like the UDA or UVF. However, there should be enough similar pro-state elements between the two conflicts to provide some insight. If U.S. or allied forces intervene on the behalf of an existing government, unofficial pro-state forces may exist. As seen with Protestant paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, these pro-state groups have their own motivations, weaknesses, strengths, and strategic concerns. Calibrating the proper level of effort against both anti-state and pro-state forces will be important in managing the scope of the conflict. Specific problems such as security force and pro-state collusion should also be considered when developing security and intelligence policies and procedures. Each future crisis will be different, but success may depend on security policies informed by lessons learned through such intense experiences as the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

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